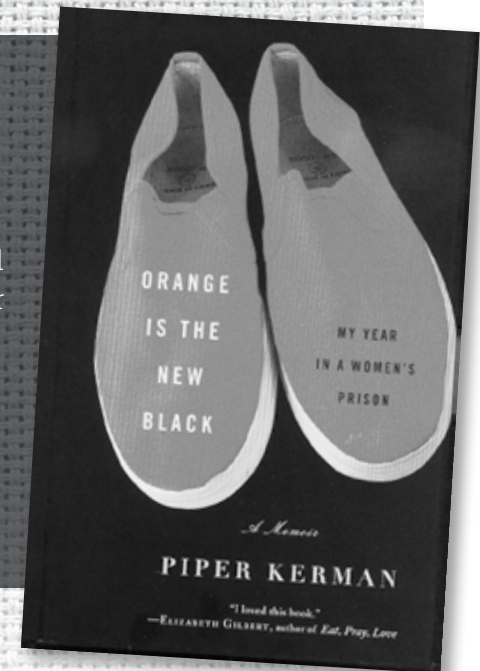


Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

"This book is impossible to put down because (Kerman) could be you. Or your best friend. Or your daughter."

- *Los Angeles Times*



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kpl.gov/book-club-in-a-bag



Piper Kerman is the author of the memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* from Spiegel & Grau. The book has been adapted by Jenji Kohan into an Emmy and Peabody Award-winning original series for Netflix.

Piper works with Spitfire Strategies as a communications consultant with nonprofits, philanthropies, and other organizations working in the public interest. She is a frequent invited speaker to students of law, criminology, gender and women's studies, sociology, and creative writing, and also to groups that include the American Correctional Association's Disproportionate Minority Confinement Task Force, federal probation officers, public defenders, justice reform advocates and volunteers, book clubs, and formerly and currently incarcerated people.

Piper serves on the board of the Women's Prison Association, and she has been called as a witness by the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights to testify on solitary confinement and women prisoners. She has spoken at the White House on re-entry and employment to help honor Champions of Change in the field. In 2014 Piper was awarded the Justice Trailblazer Award from John Jay College's Center on Media, Crime & Justice and the Constitutional Commentary Award from The Constitution Project.

(Source: piperkerman.com)

Book Summary

With a career, a boyfriend, and a loving family, Piper Kerman barely resembles the reckless young woman who delivered a suitcase of drug money ten years before. But that past has caught up with her.

Convicted and sentenced to fifteen months at the infamous federal correctional facility in Danbury, Connecticut, the well-heeled Smith College alumna is now inmate #11187-424—one of the millions of people who disappear “down the rabbit hole” of the American penal system. From her first strip search to her final release, Kerman learns to navigate this strange world with its strictly enforced codes of behavior and arbitrary rules.

She meets women from all walks of life, who surprise her with small tokens of generosity, hard words of wisdom, and simple acts of acceptance. Heartbreaking, hilarious, and at times enraging, Kerman's story offers a rare look into the lives of women in prison—why it is we lock so many away and what happens to them when they're there.

The film adaptation was produced by Netflix and released in 2013. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about Piper Kerman. What do you think of her? Does she deserve the sentence she received?
2. How would you describe the prison culture—its hierarchy and values. What must Piper learn in order to adapt to, or even survive, prison life? Discuss about how Piper's relationships changed—both inside the prison walls and outside prison.
3. Do you have favorites among the inmates? Least favorites? Are there any inmates you come to admire? if so, why? Are there inmates who don't deserve to be in prison?
4. Talk about the relationship of the inmates with the guards and prison authorities.
5. In many ways, this is a coming-of-age story. What are the ways in which prison changes Piper? What does she come to learn about who she is?
6. Has reading *Orange Is the New Black* altered your views of the criminal justice system? Or does the memoir basically confirm what you believed?
7. Why is being sent to prison frequently referred to as “disappearing down the rabbit hole”?
8. Does our criminal justice system work? Does prison work? If you could, what would you change about the legal and/or the prison system?
9. Watch the Netflix film adaptation—either selected clips or in its entirety. How does it compare with the book?
10. Talk about homosexuality, both in Piper's life and as it exists in prison.